

OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC ADVOCATE

JULY 2008

CLIPS



News :: Local

One million people turn out for New York Pride

by Cody Lyon
EDGE Contributor
Wednesday Jul 2, 2008

7/2/08

At precisely noon on Sunday, June 29, the motorcycle engines from Dykes on Bikes roared their engines and with that, the 39th annual New York City Gay Pride parade kicked off at 52nd Street and Fifth Avenue for the four mile trek through one of the country's most progressive environs.

This day transforms Gotham into a hubbub of pink-inspired Mardi Gras festivities, and according to Heritage of Pride, the group that organizes the massive event, more than 300 organizations, which included religious, school, corporate, activist and AIDS organizations, politicians and even a gay sailing instruction company, and 500,000 participants took part in the event. And an estimated million spectators cheered them on.

This year's grand marshals included Gilbert Baker, the designer of the rainbow flag who is affectionately known as the gay Betsy Ross, and Jeanne Manford, founder of Parents of Gays of Greater New York, a group that later became PFLAG. The LGBT Community Center and transgender actress Candis Cayne, who plays Billy Baldwin's mistress on ABC's "Dirty Sexy Money," also headlined the parade.



Governor David Paterson received a hero's welcome as he marched down Fifth Avenue on Pride Sunday. (Source: New York Times)

Cayne made history as the first trans actress to have a recurring role on prime-time television. She told EDGE from atop her blue convertible she still cannot believe how much has happened over the past year. And Cayne soaked up the attention she garnered as co-grand marshal.

"I am so, so honored," she said.

Participants and spectators alike are often treated to the sexually provocative, the spontaneous and most especially, the hilarious. Take for instance, Miss Columbia, a she, for the day, who wore a Baby Jane dress, Carmen Miranda wig, carrying a live poodle and sporting a beard, both dyed the colors of the rainbow while crowned by a Carmen Miranda wig and a live squawking parrot.

As in recent years, this year's parade was a colorful and enthusiastic celebration of difference and defiance, a crowd so enthused and thrilled, that a mid afternoon thunderstorm was met with laughter and applause on the lower stretch of Fifth Avenue. Many attribute this year's added excitement to recent events in California that further the prospects for marriage for same-sex couples. Governor David Paterson's directive to state agencies to recognize nuptials for gays and lesbians performed outside New York State added to the festive atmosphere.

Paterson himself marched along openly lesbian New York City Council Speaker Christine Quinn. The historic appearance, which is a first by a sitting governor, offered spectators a symbolic confirmation of how far the movement towards equality for LGBT New Yorkers has come since the first march took place after the 1969 Stonewall Bar riots.

"I'm more than impressed, it speaks volumes that he showed up for this," Manhattan resident Randy Livingston said as he watched the parade with friends at 44th Street. "Not only that, it says a lot about New York."

7/12/08

A pair of tourists from London agreed. They said the parade and Paterson's participation confirmed their belief New York remains a bastion of tolerance compared to the rest of the country.

"It says that in New York at least, people are free to be themselves," one woman, who identified herself as Susan, said.

Mayor Michael Bloomberg, state Sen. Tom Duane [D-Manhattan] and Assemblyman Danny O'Donnell [D-Upper West Side] and other politicians marched alongside Paterson. Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum waved a gay flag as she sported a sensible red straw hat.

"This is the only parade I've marched in this year and that's because I feel so strongly about this movement," she said as she noted she feels participation in the march, by both politicians and New Yorkers, sends a clear message to the rest of the country. "I think that because there have been all these progressive moves in California and with Gov. Paterson's directive, that some feel we don't really have to march or show our support any longer. I totally disagree with that.

Gotbaum added she feels the Pride parade remains as important as ever.

"We need to make sure people everywhere understand how important it is that people, whether gay or not, have a right to do things like get married if they want to," she said.

New York Sen. Chuck Schumer also marched in the parade, but other participants pointed to Paterson's directive as they took part.

"I'm a New Yorker and my partner and I have been together for six years," Jeffrey Hartenstein said as he marched with PFLAG. "We want to get married right here in New York-not in some other state, but right here."

Mama Jean Devine, who was a grand marshal in the 1970 parade, rode atop a convertible in this year's parade ahead of the Stonewall veterans. She jokingly asked whether Paterson had worn a skirt at his appearance in this year's march. Devine added she feels LGBT New Yorkers have a reason to celebrate their pride in 2008.

"Everything is going good for us now honey," she said. "We're going to get gay marriage. It's all going to be good."

Cody Lyon is a New York freelance writer whose work has appeared in a number of national daily newspapers and New York weeklies. Lyon also writes a political opinion blog at <http://codylyonblogolater.blogspot.com>

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Politicians Call For Tax Breaks For Iraq, Afghanistan War Vets

7/3/08

DIAL UP BROAD BAND

Elected city officials called on fellow lawmakers Thursday to amend a law which gives tax breaks to veterans.

The New York State Real Property Tax Law has been providing tax breaks for veterans since the Spanish-American War.

The benefits have been extended to include vets from other wars -- most recently those who fought in Kuwait during the Persian Gulf Conflict. Now local lawmakers want the law amended to include veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan.

"They sacrifice so much in a time of very big difficulty for them and their families," said Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum. "It seems to be the least we can do to help them when they return from this very difficult time in their lives."

"Providing a property tax exemption to those who have fought and sacrificed for their country is a meaningful benefit for combat veterans, demonstrating the State of New York's commitment to its heroes," said Iraq War veteran Brian LaGuardia.

Under the current law, veterans qualify for a 15-percent property tax break. Those who served in a combat zone get an additional 10-percent cut on top of that.

Veterans who are disabled as a result of their service can qualify for additional exemptions.

If the amendment is approved by the state, Gotbaum plans to introduce a bill to allow the city to opt into the law.

Queens Tribune

7/3

Queens Schools Fail Arts Requirements

By JULIET WERNER

The New York City Public Advocate's Office released a report showing a majority of Queens schools are in violation of state arts education requirements.

State regulations require all children in grades first through third to receive instruction in four arts disciplines: visual arts, music, dance and theater. In addition, state guidelines call for arts instruction to comprise 20 percent of weekly instructional time for children in first through third grade and 10 percent of weekly instructional time for children in grades four through six.

Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum's report, titled, "Out of Tune: A Survey on NYC Students' Access to Arts Education," revealed only five percent of Queens elementary schools and 33 percent of middle schools surveyed offered instruction in all four disciplines. The citywide results tell a slightly different story, with 7 percent of elementary schools and 27 percent of middle schools offering the four disciplines.

"In the cultural capital of the world, we are failing to provide New York City's children with classroom instruction in music, visual arts, dance, and theater," Gotbaum said.

But this cultural capital has lacked arts education offerings for nearly four decades. The fiscal crisis of the mid-70s, which led to the firing of 14,000 teachers, dealt the first major blow to arts education. The Giuliani Administration's initiative, Project ARTS, created in 1998, attempted to fill the gap by providing school principals with a set amount of funding that could only be used for instructional services in art, music, dance and theater; equipment, materials, supplies and partnerships with various arts and cultural institutions.

Then, at the start of the 2007 school year,

DOE announced that principals would have increased control of their school budgets and would no longer be tied to Project ARTS. The Public Advocate's survey, conducted in January 2008, therefore highlights the consequences of terminating dedicated funding.

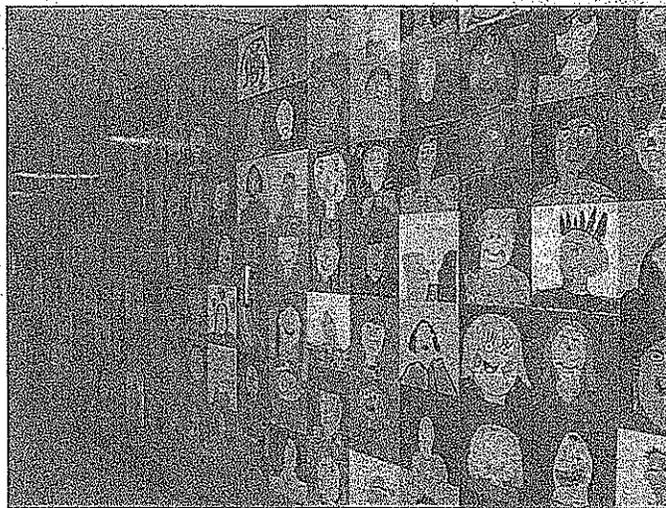
"It is still too early to judge the full impact of the elimination of Project ARTS," the report reads in part. "Many advocates are concerned, however, that budget cuts, particularly recent mid-year cuts due to the fiscal downturn, in combination with increased pressure to achieve gains on standardized tests in reading and math, create an environment in which principals will be motivated to spend funds previously dedicated to arts programs on other priorities."

Currently the Progress Report only gives a single grade, 85 percent of which is based on standardized tests. However, DOE claims that a new initiative called ArtsCount, launched in July 2007, demonstrates its commitment to eventually including arts education as a factor when determining a school's Progress Report grade. In addition, the DOE has stated that compliance with arts education regulations will soon factor into principal's performance evaluations and bonus eligibility.

The Public Advocate's office gathered data by posing as prospective parents. Surveyors most commonly reached a school counselor, parent coordinator or school secretary.

DOE has rejected the survey's methodology as flawed.

"Unlike an interested parent, the Public Advocate didn't attempt to determine if the person on the phone was best qualified to provide answers, didn't ask to be directed to or sent additional information, and asked only a few narrowly scripted questions that neglect many of the ways students receive



Only 5 percent of Queens elementary schools met state education requirements in the visual arts, music, dance and theater.

arts instruction." DOE spokesman David Cantor said.

The DOE said a significant portion of arts instruction occurs during homeroom class periods and as part of an integrated curriculum and was therefore overlooked by the Public Advocate's study, but was more accurately portrayed in its own "Annual Arts in the Schools Report," the hallmark of the ArtsCount initiative.

"As if giving our students an outlet for creative thinking, emotional development and

increased self-esteem isn't reason enough to meet state requirements, a study of the arts leads to advanced problem solving skills," Gotbaum said. "There's also a correlation between arts instruction and high graduation rates and improved academic achievement."

As a result of the survey, Gotbaum has made several recommendations including hiring more full-time certified arts teachers and creating a more balanced school Progress Report. For more information, call (212) 669-7200 or visit www.pubadvocate.nyc.gov.

RAILROAD MILE

7/3/08

BROOKLYN BRIDGE SPOUTING NEW WATERFALL P. 2

STORY

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7/3/08

Crown Heights Says They Won't Take Intake

But homeless agency says moving shelter won't harm neighborhood

By SHANE MILLER

A Department of Homeless Services (DHS) plan to move an intake shelter from Manhattan to the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn is again meeting with opposition from residents and elected officials from both boroughs.

Last Wednesday afternoon, critics of the plan held a rally on the steps of City Hall, just hours before a resolution was introduced in the City Council calling on the mayor to halt the move.

DHS is currently planning to move the Bellevue intake center for homeless men from its current location at East 30th Street and First Avenue in Manhattan to the armory at the intersection of Bedford and Atlantic avenues in Crown Heights. The armory is currently home to a 350-bed men's homeless shelter, and the community district currently has the highest number of social service beds than any other area in the city.

"We believe in fair share and taking care of the homeless, but enough is enough," said Councilwoman Letitia James. "It's time that other neighborhoods engage in fair share."

However, according to Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer, moving the shelter isn't a case of NIMBY, adding, "nobody is pushing that center out." Stringer said that Manhattan has a chronic homeless problem, and that moving the intake shelter from the borough will only increase the number of people sleeping on the streets.

"What would happen to the tens of thousands of people who sleep on our streets?" asked Stringer. "Tens of thousands of people are not going to leave the borough and travel to Brooklyn."

According to the DHS 2008 HOPE survey of homelessness in the city, 58 percent of the homeless people in the city are located in Manhattan. Each month this year, more than 2,400 homeless men walked into the Bellevue intake shelter.

"When you think of Manhattan, you tend to think only of luxury buildings and hotels," said Stringer, "but we have a homeless crisis unlike any we have ever seen."

But according to DHS

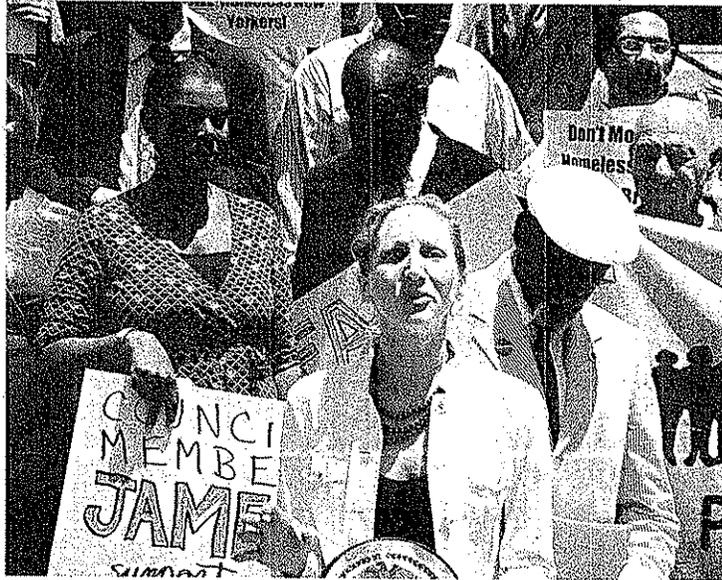
spokesperson Heather Janik, more than 30 percent of the people who were processed at the Bellevue intake shelter originally came from Brooklyn. The spokesperson also said that a new outreach program, which confronts chronically homeless people on the street and provides assistance, is already cutting down on the number of homeless people and will continue to do so after the intake shelter has moved.

The DHS representative added that the agency would be working to find Bellevue clients permanent housing before the intake shelter is closed.

To make matters worse, however, Crown Heights residents who live around the armory homeless shelter contend that it is a poorly run facility that needs to improve its own operations before even considering transferring more homeless men to the site.

"DHS says 'trust us,' but why should the community have faith after seeing years of failure?" asked Councilman Bill de Blasio. "What should happen is that Crown Heights gets a shelter that works for its clients."

Janik said this week that



Julie Zuraw, a Crown Heights resident and neighbor of the homeless shelter at the intersection of Bedford and Atlantic avenues, speaks at a rally last week on the steps of City Hall.

DHS is working to improve the Crown Heights facility. She said the number of beds at the Bedford-Atlantic facility would decrease to 230, improving the ratio of clients to staff, which will be coupled with improved assistance, such as landlord mediation and family reunification.

Julie Zuraw lives next to the armory in Crown

Heights. She said that the community has tried to advocate on behalf of the homeless men living there in the past with little success, even though there have been problems.

"We have worked and advocated to improve the conditions for the men in the shelter," she said, "even though we deal with things like a rash of car break-ins

from time to time."

Likewise, Rachel Pratt of the Crown Heights Revitalization Movement said she and her neighbors aren't against helping the less fortunate, but argued that the DHS plan was simply bad policy.

"The people of Crown Heights don't easily say no, but we are saying no now," she said.

Crooks Dial 'A' for Armed Robbery

The police are on the hunt for a pair of teens who have been pulling off armed robberies of Brooklyn cell phone stores, including one on Nassau Avenue in Greenpoint and another in Crown Heights.

The robberies began on June 14, when the two suspects walked into Crown Heights Cellular and Game on Utica Avenue and pulled out a gun, making off with cell phones and the wallets of store

employees. Three days later they pulled a similar heist at Prime Wireless in Greenpoint, and within the next week robbed two more stores at gunpoint in the 71st Precinct.

The suspects are in their late teens and are both about 5'8" tall. One of the suspects was caught on a surveillance camera. Anyone with any information about the pair should contact police at (800) 577-TIPS. — Shane Miller



Greenpoint Man Arrested in Attack

A Greenpoint man with a violent past has been arrested and charged with attempted murder in connection with the random stabbing of a Queens woman in Long Island City.

Eduarda Oliva was walking with her daughter near the intersection of Queens Plaza North and 22nd Street on June 22 when Elie Granger approached them on a bike. The disturbed man pulled out a knife and plunged it into Oliva while her 13-year-old daughter watched. Two days later cops arrested Granger,

who resides on Manhattan Avenue in Greenpoint, and charged him with attempted murder and two counts of assault.

This is not the first time Granger has been in trouble with the law. In 1993, he randomly stabbed a man in Hell's Kitchen and also fled on a bike. When he was arrested, he was linked to two other identical attacks, and served nine years in prison. Granger was out on parole when the attack on Oliva occurred. — Shane Miller



Gay City

7/4/08

EVERYONE'S GAY THE LAST SUNDAY IN JUNE

07/04/2008

Other memorable sights this past weekend included a drum corps at Saturday's Dyke March on Fifth Avenue, a young man interested in seeing that LGBT Muscovites enjoy the same rights as their peers in New York; a contingent representing SAGE, Services and Advocacy for GLBT Elders; and a 77-year-old man who knows he's not in Heaven but keeps on dancing.

Elected officials on hand included New York's senior US senator, Charles Schumer, City Comptroller William Thompson, Jr., Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum, and Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer.



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7/6/08

14

HOT-FOOTIN' ON CITY TURF

Feel the burn? David Perez, 11, and Malik Mardak stretch at Macombs Dam Park in the Bronx. Photo by Steve Delaney for the Daily News

Parks' fake grass can reach scorching 162°

BY JEFF WILKINS and ELIZABETH HAYS
DAILY NEWS WRITERS

IT'S LIKE walking on hot coals. Artificial turf installed in city fields can heat up to a blistering 162 degrees even on a mild summer day, a Daily News investigation has found.

"My feet are burning! I had to dump cold water on my shoes just to walk around," Yannick Pena, 9, complained to his mom on a recent visit to Macombs Dam Park in the Bronx, where The News found the turf hit temperatures of 145 to 160 degrees on an 80-degree day.

At Staten Island's Greenbelt Recreation Center, where turf temperatures reached 149, park regular Diana Stentella, 58, wondered how kids survived the heat.

"When they play soccer here, do they have an ambulance to take the kids away?" Stentella said. "On a hot, humid day you would faint out here."

Over two mildly warm days last month, The News took surface temperature readings at five synthetic fields across the city accompanied by NYC Park Advocates, a group that has been critical of the fake grass.

At all five, temperatures at the synthetic fields soared roughly twice as high as at nearby natural grass ones, from a low of 144 degrees at the Greenbelt Recreation Center on Staten Island to a scorching 162 at

SAMPLE GROUND TEMPERATURES

■ Riverside Park, Manhattan	Grass: 78-83 degrees	Turf: 156-158 degrees
■ Macombs Dam Park, Bronx	Grass: 79-84 degrees	Turf: 145-160 degrees
■ Flushing Meadows-Corona Park, Queens	Grass: 74-82 degrees	Turf: 158-162 degrees
■ McCauren Park, Brooklyn	Grass: 77-79 degrees	Turf: 148-152 degrees
■ Greenbelt Recreation Center, Staten Island	Grass: 71-74 degrees	Turf: 144-149 degrees



Flushing Meadows-Corona Park in Queens.

"It's sadistic that the city is installing a product which gets so hot and is actually expecting the public to play on it," said NYC Park Advocates President Geoffrey Croft.

"Clearly, artificial turf presents many serious public health and safety issues that the city simply refuses to address," Croft said.

The scorching temperatures are just one of the nagging fears critics have about the turf, an infill made of recycled crumb rubber from old tires.

The city has installed the turf at nearly 100 parks and playgrounds across the city. An additional 68 projects are in the works.

Earlier this year, The News reported concerns that the millions of tiny crumbs contain heavy metals like lead and cadmium, as well as volatile organic compounds and other chemicals.

"This is very alarming," said Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum when told of The News' findings. "Now this, on top of the other questions we have. There needs to be a moratorium on these fields."

Despite the uproar, a city Department of Health study concluded this spring that the chem-

icals in synthetic turf fields cause no known health problems.

Health officials acknowledged fake fields can get excessively hot and can cause more heat-related problems, especially in children.

When confronted with The News' findings, the Parks Department also conceded high temperatures can be a problem at turf fields.

They said they were in the process of installing signs warning visitors of the dangers at fields across the city.

"The temperatures can get very high during the heat of the day. But people are smart. They are not going to use a place that is uncomfortable to play on," said Liam Kavanagh, first deputy parks commissioner.

Kavanagh also said the city plans to stop using the crumb-rubber infill because of excessive heat and switch over to a carpet-style turf.

One of the fields The News tested, in Macombs Dam Park, already has the new turf — and still tested as high as 160 degrees.

"My feet always blister coming out here. The bottoms of my shoes feel like melted rubber, it gets so hot," said Luis Coronell, 33, who regularly takes his 10-year-old nephew, Andres, to play on turf field because there are no real ones in the neighborhood.

"You bring the kids out here, but you can't do anything because the turf gets too hot," Coronell said. "This turf is a killer."

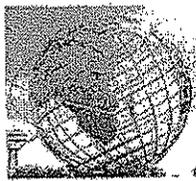
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DAILY NEWS

Sunday, July 6, 2008

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7/9/08

On the brief side... Windmuller Park Concerts



A summer-long series of outdoor concerts in local parks, made possible by a \$125,000 state grant received by Assemblymember Margaret Markey (D- Maspeth), will be launched tonight at 7 p.m. in Windmuller Park in Woodside, 39th Drive and 54th Street.

The concert, featuring the music group Blue Angel, will be followed next Sunday by "Family Fun Day" from noon to 4 p.m., also in Windmuller Park.

Other "Family Fun Days" in July will be held on: Sunday, July 20, at Big Bush Park, 61st Street at the BQE and Laurel Hill Boulevard; and Sunday, July 27, Frank

Principe Maurice Park, 54th Avenue and 63rd Street. All are noon to 4 p.m. Markey's funding will also help support a series of Children's Performance programs at these and other parks and playgrounds on weekdays in July and August featuring activities for youngsters between four and 10 years old, including dance, readings, children's puppet and theater shows. For more information about parks events, call 718-520-5919. Holocaust Damages From Hungarian Gov't

Laeb Goldstein, a 101-year-old Holocaust survivor who lost his parents, three siblings, a wife and seven children in the Holocaust- only two family members survived- will be awarded damages from the Hungarian government, Congressman Anthony Weiner (D- Queens/Brooklyn) announced.

Weiner had been working with the United Jewish Organization of Williamsburg in Brooklyn and the U.S. Embassy in Hungary to provide the award in a timely fashion considering Goldstein's age.

After being contacted by UJO in March, Weiner wrote authorities, "As you will note, Mr. Goldstein is elderly and eager to have this matter justly resolved in his lifetime. Nothing will ever heal the heartache and loss Mr. Goldstein has endured, but today we have finally helped to ease his struggle and I am proud to have served him." Gioia Goes After Deadbeat Diplomats

City Councilmember Eric Gioia (D- Long Island City) has called for a crackdown on deadbeat diplomats who owe the city more than \$7.5 million in outstanding parking tickets and nearly \$60 million in unpaid property taxes.

Gioia says that according to the city Department of Finance, 175 nations currently have outstanding unpaid parking tickets, with the top two offenders, Egypt and Kuwait, owing over \$3 million.

To crackdown on offenders, Gioia proposes that the NYPD begin towing the cars of chronic offenders, those with more than \$5,000 owed, whenever a new ticket is issued. For those who owe tax arrears for non-consular property, Gioia proposes issuing them a 60-day notice to pay up or face the cut off of their power and water. He said that in the past, offending nations have reacted to pressure from city authorities. Gotbaum: Give City War Vets Tax Relief

Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum has brought together city and state lawmakers to help in her fight to get a break on property taxes for Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans.

Gotbaum said the state Real Property Tax Law presently grants a partial real estate tax exemption for veterans of wars dating back to the Spanish-American War. She cited the sacrifices being made by today's veterans in making her plea.

"No matter what war a veteran fights in, they deserve to receive the support from their country for their sacrifice. Amending this law will uphold this nation's ideals and our support for veterans, giving them a benefit they deserve," she said.

Among those supporting her plan was Councilmember Hiram Monserrate (D- Corona), himself a vet. He said, "Our own history sets a precedent for ensuring our soldiers who make it home are provided these property tax breaks."

Brooklyn Daily Eagle

7/9/08

Parents Still In Shock Over Pre-K Admissions Chaos

by Mary Frost (mfrost@brooklyneagle.net), published online 07-09-2008

DOE Says Process Is Now 'On Track' as Deadline Looms

By Mary Frost
Brooklyn Daily Eagle

BROOKLYN — Just over a month ago, New York City parents received letters informing them which public pre-K program their child would be admitted to this September. And about 3,000 parents, including those in large swaths of Brownstone Brooklyn, were shocked when they were informed that none of the schools they had listed on their applications were available.

Hundreds of children were rejected from the same programs where their older siblings had been enrolled, although the Department of Education's (DOE's) new application process was supposed to give them priority. Some parents were told that their child was accepted at a particular school, but when they went to that school to register, they were turned away.

In the past, parents went directly to their chosen school to register. This year, an outside contractor handled pre-K applications in an attempt to centralize the process. While the DOE says that only a very small percentage of applications was rejected in error, education advocates were besieged with hundreds of calls for help.

"These changes to the pre-K admissions system have had some chaotic consequences for parents," Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum said at a rally held with Brooklyn Councilman Bill de Blasio and concerned parents on June 4.

As Round II of the application process approaches its deadline — forms have to be postmarked or handed in by Friday, July 18 — DOE spokesperson Andy Jacob feels the process is on track. "There were 20,000 applications," he told the Brooklyn Eagle Wednesday. "Seventeen thousand got placements — 15,000 got their first choice. Of the 3,000 applications that didn't get a placement, all but 120 were correct.

"About 200 parents said we made a mistake," Jacob said. "Some mistakes were on our end, some were on the applications. There were 120 or so, mostly involving siblings, where we made a mistake. We changed the placements on these." The others were either not eligible, "or there were other problems we couldn't resolve."

Of the 3,000 who received no placement, "Some parents applied to only one or two

Brooklyn Daily Eagle

7/9/08

popular schools," Jacob said. "There are still plenty of seats available. There are 23,000 total seats this year; only 17,000 are filled."

One problem, Jacob admitted, is that some of the available slots are for full-day programs. However, many are only for half-day programs — a big problem for working parents.

Parent Group To Meet With DOE

In spite of Jacob's assurances, hundreds of families still have a beef with the DOE's new admission process.

Today, some parents led by Liz Rosenberg are meeting with the head of DOE admissions. Rosenberg is a mom who started an online petition to demand the DOE offer alternatives to centralization. As of Wednesday, the petition had garnered 657 signatures.

"We plan to discuss family support, communication, alternatives to centralization and [kindergarten] admissions anxieties," Ms. Rosenberg says on her web page (<http://www.gopetition.com/online/20080.html>).

Rosenberg says that many families were left out of the process "because they never found out about the application." Another problem she describes has to do with the process itself. Under the old method, a family might be able to choose between their zoned school and a magnet program. "Under the current structure, putting anything other than our zoned school first might mean that we might not make it into our first choice or our zoned school," she says.

How to Apply

If you still haven't found a pre-school for your child, there's not much time left. Parents should pick up an application packet at a Borough Enrollment Office if they didn't receive one by mail (or can't get one online at <http://schools.nyc.gov/ChoicesEnrollment/PreK/default.htm>). Be sure to make a copy of the application for your records.

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Candidates Take Different Routes In Council Races

by Matt Hampton, Editor
07/10/2008

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City Council candidate Martha Taylor

The 2009 City Council races are coming up quickly, and Queens is as fertile a battlefield as anywhere else in New York City.

Some of the candidates are taking a grass roots approach, like Dave Kerpen. Kerpen, a former reality TV star, is keeping it in the family, and has enlisted his wife as a campaign manager.

Others, like candidate Martha Taylor, are breaking out the big guns.

Taylor has enlisted the help of political consultant Hank Sheinkopf, a no-nonsense, heavy-hitting strategist who has been attached to some of the most high profile (and successful) campaigns in recent New York history.

Sheinkopf worked on the original Senate campaign of Sen. Hillary Clinton, as well as former President Bill Clinton's reelection team for his second term. Former Gov. Eliot Spitzer utilized Sheinkopf on more than one occasion.

He worked with underdog candidate Betsy Gotbaum during her successful run for public advocate. He was also instrumental during the

comptroller campaign of William Thompson Jr., whose name is near the top of the list of candidates to replace Mayor Michael Bloomberg in 2009.

Taylor is running to replace City Councilman James Gennaro, who's being term-limited out of office and is currently in the midst of his own heated campaign against state Sen. Frank Padavan. With Sheinkopf's considerable heft behind her, Taylor has to be considered the favorite, despite the rumored candidacies of several other well known neighborhood movers and shakers, among them, Jeff Gottlieb and Michael Simanowitz, who already has more than \$56,000 in campaign funds collected.

The 24th Council District covers Jamaica Estates, Fresh Meadows and some of Jamaica — an active, if somewhat eclectic mix of neighborhoods that represent a good cross-section of the people of Queens.

Ultimately, though, it's still a relatively small piece of the pie for a strategist with a profile as high as Sheinkopf's. Austin Shafran in the offices of Sheinkopf Communications was quick to explain via e-mail what the allure of a council race was for the company.

"We only do a limited number of races, but Martha is certainly the type of candidate we would be honored to work for," he said. "Hank is very close friends with Malcolm Smith and Bill Thompson, both of whom are very close to Martha and very supportive of her candidacy. Sometimes you don't just do things for the money."

He added that Taylor had hired them for one "simple" reason: "we're the best."

Sheinkopf's first order of public business was to kick off Taylor's campaign with a public funfest at a local golf course, prior to Independence Day.

Meanwhile, Kerpen has eschewed the typical big-ticket politics of New York City from the neighboring 23rd District — including Hollis, Bellerose and Queens Village — electing to serve as his own campaign manager, and having his wife, Carrie, an accountant, serve as his campaign's treasurer. As far as he's concerned, it's a perfect fit. "I was told during the candidate training that your campaign treasurer should be someone that you trust very much," Kerpen said. "You know, not everyone, when they're talking to their campaign treasurer is also reminded to take out the garbage."

So far, he said, running his candidacy as a family affair has been what's made sense for him, and while he's seen what other candidate's put forward in terms of pushing their own brand, he's satisfied with the way things have gone so far.

"My focus is on doing what I already do best in terms of marketing myself, and going out there with my wife and trusted advisors and getting to know as many people as possible."

NYC Program to Stop Childhood Obesity

By Joshua Philipp and Ally Wang
Epoch Times Staff

Jul 14, 2008

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7/14/08



HEALTH FIRST:Public Advocate Betsy GotbaumLeading staff members from the Community Health Network announce the start of the Healthy Kids Summer Wellness Tour. (Community Health Network) ()

A new program was launched to help kids combat a growing problem in the U.S., childhood obesity. From the steps of City Hall Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum and staff from the Community Health Network announced the start of the citywide Healthy Kids Summer Wellness Tour on July 14th.

Scheduled to tour the five boroughs of New York with free coloring books in hand, advocates will help with the citywide education program and will be raffling off toys and activity invitations that promote children's health. The

program will be offering quick medical screenings to assess a child's body mass index (BMI) and will be informing parents of nutritional information and offering exercise advice to help their kids stay healthy.

"Healthy habits start early," Gotbaum said. "Parents need to help kids make healthy choices, like eating right, exercising and getting regular checkups. If we can help our youth understand the importance of adopting healthy habits at an early age, then we can set them up for good health later on in life."

According to a survey conducted by the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, it was found that 43 percent of all elementary school students in New York City suffer from obesity. It was also found that one in every five kindergartners and one in every four first graders are obese.

Catherine M. Abate, president and CEO of Community Healthcare Network discussed the significance of the program. "Community Healthcare Network is delighted to work together with NYC Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum in providing health services to children and their families throughout New York City. By helping families gain access to health care and health education, we are not only improving the health of the community, we are creating a generation of healthy children," Abate said.

The New York Times

7/15/08

July 15, 2008

Crucial Data on Graduates Is Elusive

By ELISSA GOOTMAN

The Class of 2008 has already tossed aside caps and gowns for swimsuits and tank tops. The Class of 2009 has begun dreaming of proms, diplomas and exit strategies. But the public has yet to learn what percentage of New York State's Class of 2007 actually graduated from high school.

Blame the state's new data system, which is expected to cost \$39.4 million over six years. Tom Dunn, a spokesman for the state's Education Department, acknowledged that the system had been "not completely successful" in uploading and processing information from New York's 695 school districts. He said the move to a single data repository had "caused a number of problems."

"Those problems are being corrected now," Mr. Dunn said, adding that the state was in the process of verifying numbers with school districts and expected to release 2007 graduation rates by the end of the month. (Rates for 2008, he said, would be released in February.)

Of all the statistics that increasingly figure into public debate about schools, graduation rates are widely considered among the most crucial indicators of whether a system is working. They are watched with particular urgency in New York City, where the low but slowly climbing graduation rate was a contentious topic during the 2005 re-election campaign of Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg.

For years, the city and state have used different criteria to calculate the graduation rate, and the discrepancy has caused tension among city and state officials and confusion among parents. In 2006, the state said that 50 percent of the city's seniors had graduated, while the city said 59 percent.

(The state announced 2006 graduation rates in April 2007 — just as the Class of 2007 was suffering late-stage senioritis.)

The new data system was supposed to resolve those differences, with officials in Albany and New York City agreeing to release a single number. Or, as it has turned out, to not release it for a long time.

"Asking the public to be patient here is simply not an answer," said Meryll H. Tisch, a member of the State Board of Regents, who described the delay as "frustrating and intolerable."

"I think the public should frankly demand more timely testing results and more timely graduation data," she said, "because, after all, they're being asked to invest an enormous amount of money in the system."

Ms. Tisch said she faulted the state's Education Department, some local school districts that failed to properly report their data, and McGraw-Hill, whose Grow Network subsidiary is responsible for part of the new data system and is expected to receive \$13.3 million over six years for that work.

Kelley Carpenter, a McGraw-Hill spokeswoman, said in a statement that the Grow Network was primarily responsible for the "reporting part of this system" but was "not involved in data entry and collection."

The New York Times

7/25/08

"We will continue to work with the state to generate reports as data is made available," she said.

David Cantor, a spokesman for the city's Department of Education, said the city had given the state the required information in a timely fashion. "Obviously, we'd have liked the numbers sooner," he said of the graduation rates, adding, "It's very tough to run a data system of this size smoothly the first time."

New York, which began creating the new data system several years ago, is among a number of states that have invested millions recently to computerize school information, to meet the requirements of the No Child Left Behind law and, more broadly, as part of an increased focus on educational accountability.

New York's new system assigns every student in the state an identification number so they can be tracked throughout their educational careers, even if they switch schools or districts. The system keeps track of test scores and attendance as well as graduation numbers.

Mr. Dunn, the State Education Department spokesman, said that the problems leading to the late release of the graduation rates were not specific to McGraw-Hill's Grow Network, but that the company had "a share" of responsibility.

"There's just an enormous amount of new information that's moving through here at all areas," Mr. Dunn said. "The new volume has created challenges, from people having to fill out different forms to different verifications and all of the multiple steps involved."

In an e-mail message to school superintendents this month, Jean C. Stevens, an associate state education commissioner, pointed a finger at school districts, saying that while calculating graduation rates, the state had identified many districts with possible data-reporting problems. "Many districts may have misreported graduates," she wrote. "In some cases no graduates were reported."

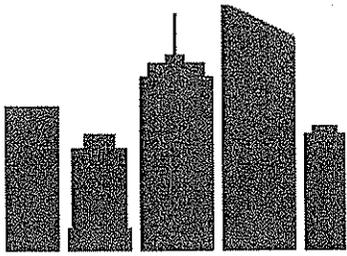
Betsy Gotbaum, the New York City public advocate, noted that the city Department of Education's own \$80 million data system, developed by I.B.M. and called ARIS, has been criticized by principals and teachers as cumbersome and difficult to use, even as parents have questioned its hefty price tag.

"We have already seen with ARIS here in the city how expensive and flashy computer systems are turning out to be clunky and flawed," Ms. Gotbaum said in a statement. "The longer we have to wait for these data systems to produce results, the more skeptical people become."

Mr. Cantor said the city was improving ARIS. "While it did not come out of the box perfect," he said, "we got an awful lot of information to a large number of people."

Jane Hirschmann, the founder and a co-chairwoman of Time Out From Testing, an antitesting group, said the information delay was "just typical" of how the city and state education departments "are spending our taxpayer money with absolutely no results."

"It would be much better to put money in the classroom and keep track of what's really important," Ms. Hirschmann said. "This is the administration of testing and data collection. As far as parents are concerned, we don't buy it. We don't think our children are better because of it."



7/15/08

gothamist

JULY 15, 2008

That's Just How Public Advocate Gotbaum Rolls



An email from the office of New York City's Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum asked, "What sort of stuff do you guys generally look for from elected officials?" You never know until you see it, but this is definitely it: the Public Advocate Community Van, which was donated to the office by Keyspan and pimped out by a local artist.

Gotbaum will be using her new ride to promote the Children's Health and Wellness Tour; which she'll take to all five boroughs and provide free health screenings to raise awareness about childhood obesity. To lure the kiddies, the van will be stocked with coloring books and they'll raffling off swag to promote childhood health: water bottles, jump ropes, Odwalla bars, flying discs, NYC paintball games to encourage exercise, and

baseball paraphernalia donated by the Mets and Yankees.

Per the press release, Gotbaum's office is "hoping that it will attract kids to get screenings – and help promote [the Public Advocate's] focus on children with its eye-catching colors."

7/15/08

»» ADELANTE

HOY NUEVA YORK
MARTES 15 de julio de 2008

Angélica Peña
angelicapena@hoynyc.com

» Salud

Una gira de salud

Programa promueve lucha contra obesidad infantil

Se busca que los niños crezcan sanos y evitar que sean obesos. Es el lineamiento de un programa dado a conocer ayer por la Defensora del Pueblo, Betsy Gotbaum y la Red Comunitaria de Servicio de Salud (Community Healthcare Network) que promueve "la gira de la salud" para asegurar que los padres tomen los primeros pasos a favor de la salud de sus hijos.

Consiste en la realización de un gira de salud por los cinco condados de la ciudad para proveer exámenes de salud gratuitos para concienciar sobre la obesidad infantil.

Una encuesta realizada en el 2003 por el Departamento de Salud de Nueva York (DOHMH), encontró que el 43% de todos los estudiantes de la escuela primaria en la ciudad presentaban sobrepeso u obesidad. El DOHMH también señaló que uno de cada 5 niños en kinder y uno de cada 4 estu-



»» Por la salud. Catherine M. Abate, CHN y Betsy Gotbaum, Defensora del Pueblo, promoviendo el programa. (foto: Cortesi)

diantes de primer grado son obesos. "Los hábitos saludables se

inician a temprana edad. Los padres necesitan para ayudar a los niños tomar decisiones salu-

dables, como comer bien, hacer ejercicio y obtener chequeos regulares", dijo Gotbaum.

» LAS FECHAS

- Julio 19: Orchard Beach, El Bronx
- Julio 20: Prospect Park, Brooklyn
- Julio 24: Brooklyn Bridge Movie Night, Brooklyn
- Julio 26: Feria Children's Aid Society, Manhattan
- Julio 27: Festival Juan Pablo Duarte, Manhattan
- Agosto 5 - National Night Out Against Crime, Queens
- Agosto 16: Harlem Week, Manhattan
- Agosto 17: Harlem Week, Manhattan
- Agosto 23: Baretto Park, El Bronx
- Septiembre 6: Feria Richmond County, Staten Island



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DAILY NEWS

7/16/08

News Blog

BLOGS HOME NEWS SPORTS ENTERTAINMENT LIFESTYLE



ELIZABETH BENJAMIN

The Daily Politics is a running conversation about New York's political scene. Read, share your thoughts, or -- please! -- send me a tip.



July 16, 2008

Q Poll: NYers Like Mike - But Not Enough To Keep Him

Today's Q poll finds that while Mayor Bloomberg tops the list of would-be mayoral candidates in 2009, New Yorkers don't support changing the term-limits rules enough to keep him around for another four-year term.

Bloomberg's approval rating continues to soar - 71-22 - and asked whom they would like to see elected mayor in the next election, 38 percent of poll respondents picked Hizzoner.

But 55 percent of poll respondents said they think it would be unfair to overturn term limits at this stage of the game to allow Bloomberg another term; overall they oppose extending term limits, 56-38, and support the basic concept of limiting elected officials' time in office, 71-23.

Voters also didn't favor (65-32) the idea of extending the current two-term or eight-year limits so city officials can stick around a little longer.

The next closest non-candidate to Bloomberg? NYPD Commissioner Ray Kelly, who got 12 percent.

Brooklyn Borough President Marty Markowitz and Rep. Anthony Weiner, both of whom have actually publicly admitted to being contenders (unlike Kelly, that is) are nearly tied at 11 percent and 10 percent, respectively.

Council Speaker Christine Quinn and Comptroller Bill Thompson are deadlocked at 7 percent. Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum, who has said she's unlikely to run, gets four percent. Councilman Tony Avetta, who has formally announced his mayoral campaign, doesn't even rate.

7/16/08

Volume 78 / Number 7 - July 16 - 22, 2008
West and East Village, Chelsea, Soho, Noho, Little Italy, Chinatown and Lower East Side, Since 1933

City and electeds put on pressure for a new school

By Gabriel Zucker

In another step toward creating a new public middle school at 75 Morton St., Deputy Mayor Dennis Walcott reported that the Department of Education has spoken with the Empire State Development Corporation to retract the request for proposals the state agency issued last week. At the same time, however, local elected officials warned that those talks might be reaching a dead end, and that the R.F.P. is likely to remain as is.

Walcott said, if E.S.D.C. does not retract the R.F.P. altogether, he would ask them to ensure that a middle school is part of the winning bidder's plans.

Walcott reported the progress at a meeting with D.O.E. convened on Monday morning by Congressmember Carolyn Maloney, to discuss the epidemic of school overcrowding that is threatening School District 2. Walcott said he called E.S.D.C. within 24 hours of a meeting convened two weeks ago by Assemblymember Deborah Glick.

Glick said yesterday that she felt E.S.D.C. was "not co-operating," but that "we have pressed" for it, and "if D.O.E. wanted to focus on this, they certainly have the personnel to do so."

The R.F.P., which was published in the Wall Street Journal last Monday, has a quick deadline of Aug. 13, leaving the city little time to negotiate with E.S.D.C. Lisa Willner, E.S.D.C. communications director, maintained, however, that the deadline provided "adequate time" for negotiations to occur.

Maloney said there was "no guarantee" that 75 Morton St. would become a school.

"If it is a state office building, there is no reason why it can't be a school," she stated.

The meeting with D.O.E. was attended by Maloney, City Comptroller William Thompson, Borough President Scott Stringer, State Senators Liz Krueger and Tom Duane, State Assemblymembers Brian Kavanagh and Glick, City Council Speaker Christine Quinn, Councilmembers Rosie Mendez, Robert Jackson, Jessica Lappin and Daniel Garodnik and Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum, along with community Board and other local representatives.

"I joked that we had more elected officials than the Democratic Convention," said Maloney. "I was amazed at how many people showed up."

The issue of school overcrowding has surged to the forefront in recent months, given the crisis the school system is in. Maloney got involved in the issue when elected officials and community leaders asked her to help them schedule a meeting with D.O.E., a feat that took three months.

Glick also suspected that the issue gained prominence when individuals who purchased expensive apartments in areas known for their public schools vocally complained to D.O.E. after learning that those schools might reject their children anyway.

"When you're constantly called to task, you can't be telling people that you won't meet with them," she said of D.O.E.

Maloney explained that the flurry of action is what happens "when it gets to the point where you can't walk down the street or go to church without your constituents coming up to you and saying it's overcrowded," noting that two-thirds of schools in the district were above capacity.

"We're in a crisis," she said. "This is totally unacceptable. We have some of the most overcrowded schools in the whole system."

Glick conceded that D.O.E. had some long-term proposals, but "in the interim, there's a crunch, and they haven't come to any particular solution."

Maloney pointed out that only 5 percent of D.O.E.'s capital budget for school construction had been allocated to Manhattan, compared with 25 percent for the Bronx, 22 percent for Brooklyn, and 36 percent for Queens.

Lappin, chairperson of the City Council's Land Use Subcommittee on Landmarks, Public Siting and Maritime Uses, plans to hold a hearing on that budget, according to Maloney.

CRAIN'S

NEW YORK BUSINESS®

7/16/08

July 16, 2008 2:42PM

Bloomberg tops mayoral shortlist

Although 38% of poll respondents said they'd like to see Mr. Bloomberg as mayor in 2009, 55% said changing term limit rules in the middle of the game is unfair.

Mayor Michael Bloomberg tops New Yorkers' list for best 2009 mayoral candidate, though the majority of New Yorkers say changing term limit rules would be unfair.

Nearly three quarters of New Yorkers approve of the job Mr. Bloomberg is doing, according to a Quinnipiac University poll released Wednesday. But although 38% of poll respondents said they'd like to see Mr. Bloomberg as mayor in 2009, 55% said changing term limit rules in the middle of the game is unfair. Another 40% say Mr. Bloomberg deserves more time to finish what he started.

"New York City voters sure like Mayor Mike, and they'd love to keep him around for four more years, but not enough to change the two-term limit," said Quinnipiac director Maurice Carroll.

Taking second place in a hypothetical mayoral race was Police Commissioner Raymond Kelly, who received 12% of the vote, while Brooklyn Borough President Marty Markowitz came in third with 11%.

Among other potential candidates, Democratic Congressman Anthony Weiner came in fourth at 10% and New York City Comptroller William Thompson, as well as City Council Speaker Christine Quinn, each received 7%. Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum came in last, with 4% of the vote.

When asked to grade Mr. Bloomberg performance as mayor against former mayors that included Rudolph Giuliani, David Dinkins and Edward Koch, a majority of voters gave Mr. Bloomberg higher marks.

The Quinnipiac poll surveyed 999 registered voters between July 10 and 14, and has a margin of error of +/-3.1%.

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7/17/08

Domestic abuse ploy: ACS 'claim'

NEW YORK. It's hell all over again for victims of domestic violence whose battering spouses call the Administration for Children's Services with false claims about their abusive parenting.

Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum said 72 percent of domestic violence service workers had at least one case where battered women were victims of malicious false reports.

"I was the domestic abuse victim, but I was the one being punished," said Tanya McLeod, 42.

McLeod's ex-husband, Anthony Bullock called the ACS tip line from Rikers Island, claiming McLeod, tried to kill her children, then 9, 7 and 2. She went through three months of early morning door knocks by ACS agents.

"One phone call, one malicious report, can keep a victim trapped in a cycle of abuse and harassment for years," Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum said.

Gotbaum said making malicious false reports to ACS a felony would help bring abusers to justice.

ANDREW S. GARIB/METRO

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7/17/08

What would you change about NYC?

With elections on the way and *Hair* in previews this week, we've started thinking about activism and change. And, it seems, so have you. Inspired by a readers' poll of top concerns, we show you how to improve our city, no matter how much—or how little—time you're willing to give. Illustrations by Kelly Schykulski

The MTA sucks

Your train never seems to be running on time (if it's running), you spend rush hours pressed up against skeezy armpits, and the stations are filthy, hot and occasionally scented with human poop. And the MTA *still* wants to raise the fare! "Money is a major problem for the MTA," explains Gene Russianoff, staff attorney for the NYPIRG Straphangers Campaign. "There's a \$500 million to \$700 million hole in the 2009 budget because of massive debt and tanking real-estate taxes." Yeah, yeah, whatever—my

heart is bleeding. What can I actually *do* about the never-ending hikes?



You don't have to be Abbie Hoffman to make sure your company uses the TransitChek program, in which you can put aside up to \$115 pretaxes to pay for your commute. It essentially brings the cost of a 30-day unlimited MetroCard down by a third or a half, depending on your base salary (for info, visit transitcenter.com). Second, fill out those rider report cards the MTA offers. Third, praise or profane the powers that be in the

Straphangers Campaign Rider Diaries, or write a letter to the MTA directly (do both at straphangers.org).



MTA board and committee meetings are open to the public, so if you've got the patience, those transit stiffs are your captive audience. You should arrive about 30 minutes ahead of time to register, and you must limit your reasoned argument to 120 seconds, but at least you can voice your opinions to someone other than the drunk guy lolling next to you on the B. Upcoming meetings are scheduled

► ACTION-O-METER: The lighter the fist, the less the commitment • I have no time for this:

I want to devote my life to this:



We change NYC

for the mornings of Monday 21 and Wednesday 23 at the MTA Headquarters (347 Madison Ave between 44th and 45th Sts, fifth-floor board room; mta.info/mta/news/calendar.htm). The Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee (pcac.org) is another rider-advocacy organization, despite being funded by the MTA. The group's various councils meet monthly and the whole committee meets four times a year. All of these powwows, held at lunchtime in midtown, are open to the masses.

 "This is like volunteering on steroids, but there are three open volunteer positions on the NYC Transit Riders Council, which is the official advisory body to the MTA," says Bill Henderson, executive director of PCAC. "Council members are appointed by the public advocate and the mayor." For consideration, contact Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum's office and make your case (212-669-7200).—Jaime Jordan

Overdevelopment is killing your neighborhood

"The city is catering to megadevelopers while completely ignoring the needs of New Yorkers," says Candace Carpenter of Develop Don't Destroy Brooklyn. The Atlantic Yards is probably the city's best-known battleground, but New Yorkers are channeling Jane Jacobs all over the five boroughs. While issues like affordable housing and eminent domain drive many of these campaigns, Deborah Marton, executive director of the Design Trust for Public Space, believes that "environmental quality and sustainability" are also major concerns.

 If you don't have time to volunteer with an agency, make a donation to the Design Trust (designtrust.org), or take a \$15 walking tour with the Municipal Art Society (mas.org)—both organizations advocate for responsible use of public space. "And remain educated by reading about development issues," says Marton. She suggests *The Architect's Newspaper* (archpaper.com) or *Brownstowner* (brownstowner.com). If you're following the Atlantic Yards action, though, the blog *No Land Grab* (nolandgrab.org) provides a pithy overview of events.

5
MINUTES!

 "You can yell and scream about development, but you have to contact the legislator to make a difference," says Carpenter. "Also, elect officials who aren't beholden to big real-estate money." To look up your New York City Council representative, go to council.nyc.gov. At Place Matters (placematters.net), you can raise awareness about noteworthy buildings and sites in your community—thus making them harder to bulldoze—and a \$50 membership in the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation (gvshp.org) gives you reduced rates on events like lectures and walking tours, plus information on how to report landmark violations.

 "Join your community board. That's the main avenue for average residents to get involved," explains Marton. "They can have an influence on everything about a new project, including use, scale and appearance." For meeting and membership details, go to nyc.gov/cau. If you're more interested in preserving the city skyline, GVSHP had two job openings at press time (gvshp.org/employment.htm). And if you're in it for the really long haul, consider a career in urban planning: The American Planning Association's New York Metro Chapter (nyplanning.org) provides information on approved courses and employment opportunities.—JJ

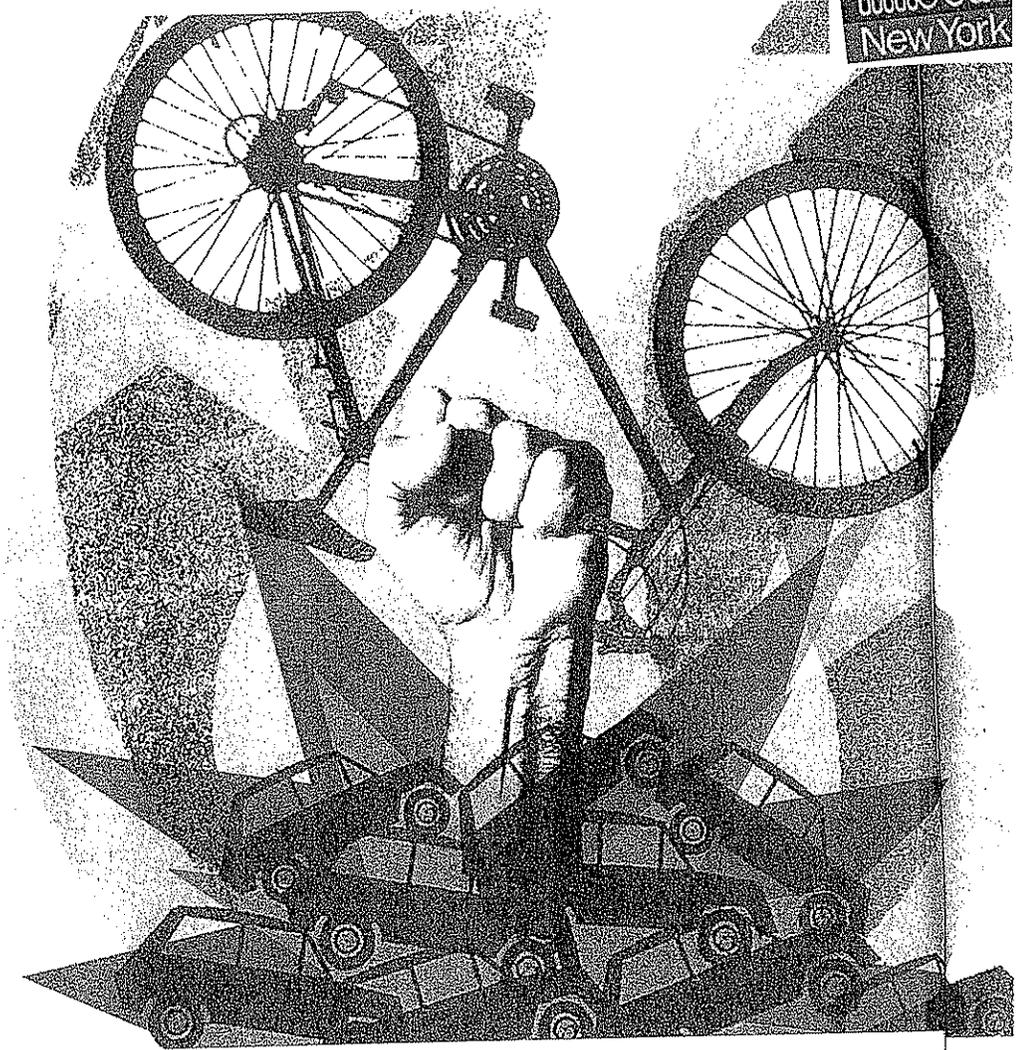
People are hungry, and food is being wasted

It's no big revelation that New Yorkers like to eat, and it's no big surprise that the restaurants we eat at tend to toss out a huge amount of our leftovers. Every day, City Harvest picks up more than 50,000 pounds of wasted edibles, delivering them to about 600 soup kitchens and food pantries. But rising food and fuel prices have hit such distribution groups hard, just as the real value of food

stamps is declining and demand for food relief is going up. In addition to cleaning your plate, here's how you can help.

 Just ask for a doggie bag. "Many people doom themselves to waste food by the way they shop, make dinner or order in restaurants," says Jonathan Bloom, who launched the blog *Wasted Food* (wastedfood.com) in 2006. "There's a bit of a stigma in taking food home—people don't want to seem gauche, so they throw away what could be tomorrow's lunch." Not the type to leave any leftovers? Then you're in luck: This month, during two New York City Restaurant Weeks (Monday 21–July 25 and July 28–August 1), you can save food by eating food; a partnership with American Express means that diners who pay with their cards donate 50¢ of the price of their meal to City Harvest (cityharvest.org).

 Moving? Cleaning? Donate those Goya cans hiding in the back of your kitchen cabinet. The Food Bank for New York City (foodbanknyc.org) can tell you where to bring them. Go to the website, look at the Individual Food Donations page and type in your zip code—you'll get a list of local soup kitchens and pantries where you can drop off your boxes. No extra food?



7/17/08

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Official Calls For Replacement Of Playground Mats

7/21/08

Rubber Surfaces Heat To Severely Dangerous Temperatures In Summer



NEW YORK (CBS) — It's a danger right at your child's feet: overheated playground mats leaving barefoot children with severe burns.

Reporting
Kristine Johnson

CBS 2 has been bringing these horrifying incidents to light for several summers now and one city official is saying enough is enough.

Just last year, CBS 2 introduced you to Will Casson, whose feet were burned and blistered from walking barefoot on mats at an Upper East Side playground. A year later, his parents say the city still has done nothing to remove the danger from the city's parks.

"At the very least we need signs that warn of the burn dangers immediately and for the city to remove and replace these with a better surface," said Rich Casson, Will's father.

Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum is getting behind the Casson family. On Monday, she called on the Parks Department to make changes immediately.

"I'm asking the Parks Department to immediately replace or treat these dangerous mats to make the playground safe for children," she said.

Parks officials say they're doing everything they can to ensure safety on the playground, but Gotbaum says the department must act faster.

"Our parents and children are at risk and this summer is going to be even hotter and we have to make sure that people are as safe as possible," she said.

Watchdog groups say more than a dozen children each year are treated for burns caused by hot playground equipment. Once a surface reaches over 120 degrees, burns become a possibility.

How hot can playground equipment get?

A reading taken Friday afternoon showed a temperature of nearly 167 degrees.

"Parents do not know that these temperatures rise to this degree. We must do a better job and find solutions," said Geoffrey Croft, a NYC parks advocate.

Gotbaum is also asking the Parks Department to put up more signs and in multiple languages, explicitly alerting parents of the possible dangers of the playground mats.

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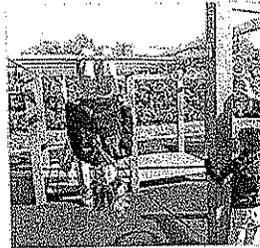
The New York Times

July 21, 2008, 2:20 pm

Are Playground Safety Mats Too Hot to Handle?

By SEWELL CHAN

Updated, 3:43 p.m. | Rubber safety mats have become a fixture of children's playgrounds in New York City, buffering heads, hands and other body parts when children slip and fall. But two news accounts today — in The Daily News and in Metro New York — question whether the mats themselves pose a hazard: They can get so hot under the summer sun that they can burn bare feet.



Children at a playground in East Rockaway in 2005. (Photo: Kirk Condyles for The New York Times)

The Daily News found that some of the mats could get as hot as 160 degrees. Two of the city's burn centers evidently reported treating 10 cases of playground burns last year, and at least three lawsuits have been filed by parents over playground burns.

"Playgrounds should be designed with canopies," Geoffrey Croft, the founder of the NYC Park Advocates, a parks watchdog group, said in a phone interview. "The city should be pressuring the manufacturers to come up with a solution."

This afternoon, Betsy Gotbaum, the city's public advocate and a former city parks commissioner, said in a statement:

It's unacceptable that children suffer severe and completely avoidable injuries due to equipment installed and maintained by the city. How many burn cases will it take before the city wakes up and acts? Signs warning against bare feet on the playground are not sufficient to ensure children's safety. The city needs to do more to protect children, and in the interim, ensure the signs are actually helpful in warning and informing parents of small children about these dangers.

In a phone interview, Adrian Benepe, the commissioner of the city's Department of Parks and Recreation, said the criticism was understandable but unwarranted.

He noted that all parks have signs warning children and other users to wear shoes, and said that it was imperative that parents and caretakers keep a careful eye on youngsters, who sometimes want to run barefoot. "If you wear shoes, even on the hottest days, you won't burn your feet," he said. "There aren't many cases of kids with burned feet that have been brought to our attention."

The city's roughly 1,000 playgrounds all have equipment that conforms to safety standards set by the Consumer Product Safety Commission and ASTM International, formerly the American Society for Testing and Materials, Mr. Benepe added.

The federal safety commission's Public Playground Safety Handbook [pdf] specifies several types of materials approved for use as safety surfaces in playgrounds, including rubber mats and tiles, engineered wood fiber, pea gravel, sand, shredded or recycled rubber mulch and wood mulch or chips, but Mr. Benepe said that rubber mats were the best solution for New York City. A loose-fill surface, like one made of wood mulch or gravel, would be difficult to clean and keep safe in a heavily used urban space and could quickly become a dumping ground for dog waste and other hazards like

7/21/08

DAILY NEWS

7/21

NY Minute

Betsy burns over mats

A DAY after they were exposed as hazardously hot, city Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum demanded that black playground safety mats designed to protect children from falls be "immediately" replaced so that more children aren't burned.

"Every time the temperature rises, playgrounds get more hazardous," she said, noting signs in some city parks warning against going barefoot weren't adequate.

"We went to 12 playgrounds and [found] not a single sign," said Geoffrey Croft of NYC Park Advocates, who suggested lighter-colored safety mats or canopies to shade them.

A Daily News investigation found some mats hitting a high of 165 degrees.

Rachel Monahan

B'klyn man shot dead

A 31-YEAR-OLD Brooklyn man was found shot to death early yesterday, cops said.

Odell Turner was found with a single gunshot wound to his chest about 2 a.m. at the corner of Nostrand Ave. and Midwood St. in Wingate, police said.

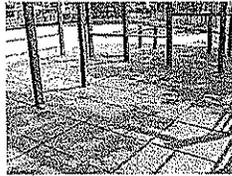
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TOP STORIES

Jul 31, 2008 On NY1 Now: Weather On 1 Weather: Early Storms/Late Sun, High:86



Parents Urge City To Replace Hot Rubber Mats In City Playgrounds

DIAL UP BROADBAND

Hot temperatures are causing problems on city playgrounds as black rubber mats designed to cushion falls absorb heat, burning the little hands and feet of the children playing.

Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum and parents are urging the city to replace or treat the dangerous playground material.

The mats are said to reach up to 166 degrees on some days.

But the Parks Department said they would not replace the mats, claiming there are signs warning parents of the danger.

"I just came in the entrance here, and there was no sign about too much heat in the parks or bare feet," said Gotbaum. "There there's a sign in English saying no bare feet, but it doesn't explain or tell you why."

"I just feel like no parent should have to see their child suffer for days in an intensive care unit because their skin came in contact for a few seconds with a material that reaches such high temperatures, when there are perfectly acceptable alternatives," said parent Reyhan Mhran.

Gotbaum is urging the city to consider surfacing the playground with lighter colors. Until then she says more informative signs are needed.

Senator Carl Kruger has called on the city to form an emergency task force to evaluate the safety of the mats.

PRINT-FRIENDLY
VERSION

8/22/08

DAILY NEWS

7/22/08

News Blog

BLOGS HOME NEWS SPORTS ENTERTAINMENT LIFESTYLE



Elizabeth Benjamin

THE DAILY POLITICS



ELIZABETH BENJAMIN

The Daily Politics is a running conversation about New York's political scene. Read, share your thoughts, or -- please! -- send me a tip.

July 22, 2008

Hot Footing (Updated)

On the heels of a DN report Sunday that found the black rubber mats in city playgrounds can get dangerously hot in the summer and burn childrens' feet comes this YouTube video from [Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum](#), who wants the parks department to immediately replace or treat the mats to make them safe.

UPDATE: Mayor Bloomberg was asked about the topic of artificial turf in general during the Q-and-A portion of his press conference and said the following:

"We just don't have the money for grass, which requires an enormous amount of maintenance and it doesn't stand up; you would have most parks closed all the time."

"...I do remember as a kid going to the park - you would get on that metal slide in the bright sun. It was hot. Anybody not have that experience? And somehow or another, we lived through it...If it's hot, don't sit on it."

"I don't think we put anybody in a hazardous situation. Air conditioning the slide is not something we can afford to do...The black rubber mats, if the alternative is asphalt, which does get hot, and if kids fall on it, that's dangerous."

"I'm not unsympathetic, but I'm just saying that unfortunately, it's part of what happens in the summer."



7/22/09

04 new york
 Prosecutors take 697 weapons in gun buy-back program: Law enforcement authorities have collected 697 weapons and hand as part of a guns-for-money exchange in Brooklyn held over the weekend at six churches. People could turn in handguns and loaded in exchange for \$200 bank cards. The weapons had to be in plastic or paper bags or shoe boxes, BB guns and air pist

Hot playground fix urged

ANDREW S. GARIB
 letters@metro.us

Parents whose kids have been burned by dangerously hot playground mats have an ally at City Hall.

Public Advocate Bersy Gotbaum said in a letter to Parks Commissioner Adri-

an Benepe that the black rubber mats, which have caused serious burns to children's feet, should be replaced with safer alternatives. The current mats have reached 160 degrees in the sun. The shock-absorbing mats "are designed to protect children, but end up burning them and sending them to the hospital," Got-

baum said. Gotbaum and watchdog NYC Park Advocates recommended mats in lighter colors that won't absorb as much heat from the sun, as advised by the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission. They also asked for signs that clearly warn parents of the danger of bare skin on hot mats. Current signage that just re-

quires park patrons to wear footwear could be confusing, they said. Parents of burn victims said they appreciated having Gotbaum on their side. "It's an incredibly big step," said Rich Casson, whose 2-year-old son Will's burned feet were featured on the cover of Metro Friday. "Our goal is to make a change."

Burning issue at hot tot lots
 City facing injury lawsuits



Metro, July 21

World Journal
E1 世界日報 2008年7月22日 星期二
LOCAL NEWS
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RN註冊護士執照考試培訓班
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公園黑膠地面 屢燙傷兒童

夏天酷熱 警示不足 孩子遊玩務必穿鞋 高邦促公園局全面更換

【本報記者劉奕紐約報導】由於兒童遊樂場使用的黑膠皮地面在夏天熱度很高，因此導致兒童被燙傷的事件多次發生。市公益維護人高邦(Betsy Gotbaum)21日致信市公園局局長班尼普(Adrian Benepe)，要求立刻更換兒童遊樂場(playground)的黑膠皮地面，以免再次發生兒童被燙傷事件。

高邦表示，對於經常見到有孩子因為兒童遊樂場的黑膠皮地面而被燙傷的事件，感到非常震驚和難過。雖然有些公園裡有禁止光腳在地面上行走的標誌，但這對於保障孩童的安全並不夠，有時他們的手會接觸到地面，甚至臉部或其他部位也會觸到地面。而且在有大量移民的社區，這些標誌並沒有用除了英文以外的語言書寫。

高邦和紐約公園民權組織(NYC Park Advocates)的維權人士，21日上午檢查了布朗士和曼哈坦部分的公園遊樂場，發現有10個公園遊樂場連最基本的禁止光腳行走的標誌都沒有，其中包括了曼哈坦華埠的哥倫布公園和東城的東河兒童遊樂場。

紐約公園民權組織的Geoffrey Croft表示，市府一直沒有重視這些問題，且總是把責任歸咎於家長或是看護者沒有好好看管孩子，而不是把這些屢燙傷傷害到孩子的黑膠皮地面換掉。

高邦建議公園局可以採用美國消費品安全委員會(Consumer Product Safety Commission)推薦的淡色膠皮地面，另外，在所有兒童遊樂場都要用多種語言標明容易引起燙傷的地方或器械。

在華埠哥倫布公園裡總有不少各個年齡層的孩子在玩耍，爬滑梯、玩單槓，有些孩子有家長陪同，也有不少是自己單獨或和同學前來。

一位家長表示，自己的孩子小，所以一直要盯著他，絕不允許赤足走在地上，所以應該不會被黑膠皮地面燙到。也有家長表示，不少公園裡的兒童遊樂場都有綠樹遮陽，不會太熱，如果地面太熱的時候，就不會讓孩子出來玩，或是去有樹蔭的兒童遊樂場。一位韓裔家長表示，聽到過有關孩子被地面燙傷的故事，但認為是怪事，一下或是擦一下地面，應該不會被燙傷，關鍵是不要赤足站在地上。

中華公所主席于金山表示，安裝膠皮可有效防止兒童摔倒受傷，雖然兒童在哥倫布公園被燙傷的事情最近沒有發生，但是兒童遊樂場的黑膠皮地面在夏天的確熱度很高，最好有個兩全其美的方法，比如在夏天多澆水冷卻地面或更換膠皮。



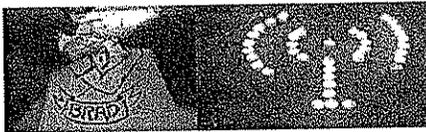
- ▲公益維護人高邦21日表示，擔心公園地面的黑色膠皮在夏天過熱燙傷孩童。因為兄弟玩耍，弟弟的鞋子掉了光腳站在地上。(本報記者劉奕攝)
- ▲一名小妹妹光著腳跑來跑去，經媽媽叮嚀才把鞋穿上。(本報記者簡一夫攝)
- ▲正值暑假期間，哥倫布公園遊樂場傍晚還是很多兒童在嬉戲。(本報記者簡一夫攝)
- ▲一位爸爸仔細叫女兒把鞋穿上。(本報記者簡一夫攝)



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Parents and Politicians Battle NYC ACS Abuse

NYC ACS official admit to rise in abuse and neglect complaints of children in foster care.

By Amadi Ajamu

Human rights advocates attribute these findings to a substantial increase in children being seized by ACS from families on false or flimsy evidence of "abuse" and then being put into a traumatic and abusive foster care system. Parents of these children have taken a proactive stance in their fight to regain custody of their children and have begun to expose the systemic failure of ACS.

Keywords: [Analysis](#), [National](#), [Government](#), [Human Rights](#), [Law](#).



Amber James

July 24, 2008

Parents and Politicians Battle NYC ACS Abuse

By Amadi Ajamu

The New York City Administration for Children's Services (ACS) recently acknowledged that abuse and neglect complaints of children in foster care rose 12 percent last year (NY Post 7/21/08). Human rights advocates attribute these findings to a substantial increase in children being seized by ACS from families on false or flimsy evidence of "abuse" and then being put into a traumatic and abusive foster care system. Parents of these children have taken a proactive stance in their fight to regain custody of their children and have begun to expose the systemic failure of ACS.

Lateefah Carter, a member of the Masses United for Human Rights, said "ACS is making money off of our children. Many corporations, universities and religious institutions are involved in the exploitation of Black and Latino children in foster care. Victimized parents are beginning to understand the need to organize and fight together instead of individually. We are stronger when we unite."

A July 2008 report by NYC Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum, "Calling in Abuse," acknowledged an increase in false reports of child abuse, particularly in case where domestic violence is involved. "One phone call, one malicious report (to ACS), can keep a victim trapped in a cycle of abuse and harassment for years." False and unsubstantiated reports of child abuse can occur in hospitals, schools, and with vindictive individuals. Gotbaum is calling for "making false allegations of abuse a felony offense."

Republican State Senator Owen Johnson and Assemblywoman Michelle Titus have also entered the fray to quell abuse of children and families by ACS. The State Assembly recently passed legislation requiring the state to conduct criminal background checks and reject foster care applicants convicted of violent crimes.

Titus joined Senator Johnson on his bill (S7963-A) to make it harder for the government to take custody of children whose parent is suspected of suffering from a very rare mental illness called Munchausen syndrome by proxy. Persons diagnosed with the disease are said to deliberately make a child sick or exaggerate symptoms in order to get attention from doctors.

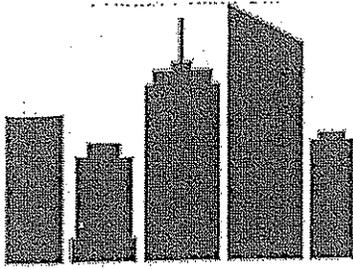
Senator Johnson's bill calls for a court hearing prior to the removal of a child based on an allegation of Munchausen and the child's pediatrician or primary care physician would be allowed to rebut the allegation at the hearing. It would apply to any child currently in protective custody at this time.

Dr. Eric Mart, a forensic psychologist and internationally known expert on Munchausen questions its scientific and legal basis. "A wide variety of unsubstantiated or untested treatments and psychological tests have flourished in recent years. It is disturbing that the frequency of their use greatly outstrips their evidentiary base."

Many families have been torn apart by this illusive disease. Last year, Marvin and Vanessa James lost custody of their six year old daughter Amber, after ACS alleged Vanessa had Munchausen. Vanessa has been repeatedly psychologically evaluated with negative diagnoses.

"We are very glad that Senator Johnson and Assemblywoman Titus have put forward these bills and would like them to be put on a fast track for passage. It has been a nightmare for us. We just want our daughter back," said Marvin James.

7/24/08

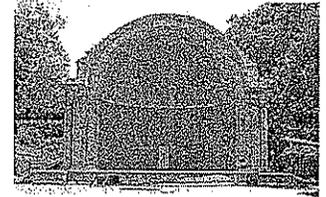


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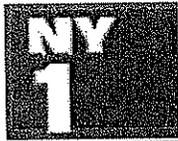
JULY 25, 2008

Is the Naumburg Bandshell the Most Hated Bandshell in New York?

The Bowery Boys take a look back at the sordid history of the Naumburg Bandshell, which still sits in Central Park (since 1923) "thanks to some tenacious descendants of the man who donated it, Elkan Naumburg." Seems the bandshell's time in the sun has passed, and as the music has moved on elsewhere, it's become a homeless haven. "In the comprehensive 1985 survey by the Central Park Conservancy, **it was recommended that the bandshell, never part of the original plan, be demolished or at least moved. Everyone generally agreed that it had become an outdated eyesore.**" The Naumburg family put a stop to this with a 1993 court case which landed in their favor, ruling that the "destruction of a gift" is prohibited! Ex-parks commissioner Betsy Gotbaum once said that they've made "the best of a bad situation" regarding its presence. More recently, the Brooklyn Philharmonic played there.



By Jen Carlson in Arts and Events | [Link](#) | [Comments \(7\)](#) | [Recommend this!](#) | [Share +](#)
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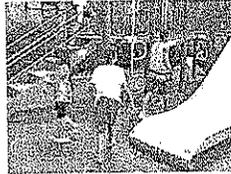


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Politics



Public Advocate Calls For Multi-Lingual Park Signs

DIAL UP BROAD BAND

7/25/08

July 25, 2008

Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum renewed her call to make city parks safe for children Friday.

On Friday she urged the Parks Department to have all playground signs in several languages besides English.

Gotbaum says there are not enough signs, and existing ones lack enough information.

"The simplest, least expensive thing the city can do is put up signs explaining, 'Don't let your children go barefoot,'" said Gotbaum. "Because people see it's prohibited to be barefoot, but they look here, they don't see glass, this park is very clean -- it looks very, very nice. But people don't understand that if their children run there barefoot, they could be burned."

On Monday, Gotbaum called for the city to replace the black rubber mats at the playgrounds, claiming the mats can reach dangerous temperatures and severely burn children.

The Parks Department responded by saying, "Signs are posted at playgrounds throughout the city reminding park patrons to wear shoes and appropriate clothing when it gets hot. We will ensure that signs are posted at every playground and in different languages where appropriate."

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EL CAMPEON DE LOS HISPANOS

EL DIARIO

7/26/09

MANNY PATINO/EDIP

LETEROS BILINGUES EN AREAS DE JUEGO - En vista de la reciente controversia sobre las quemaduras que sufren los niños durante el verano por el piso caliente en los jardines de juego de los parques de la ciudad, la Defensora Pública Betsy Gotbaum hizo un llamado ayer para que los letreros y señales de advertencia, sean más claros, visibles, y en otros idiomas como el español, chino; es decir dependiendo del vecindario donde estén ubicados. El Departamento de Parques necesita reconocer la naturaleza multicultural y multilingüe de Nueva York..., dijo Gotbaum ayer en una conferencia en el Mill Brook Playground de El Bronx.



METRO

Héroe caído vuelve a casa



Staten Island Advance

7/26/08

OP-EDIT

YOUR OPINION

If you would like your opinion published, we require your full name (or first two initials), address and telephone number for verification purposes. We publish your full name and community. We do not publish anonymous or unsigned letters or letters that carry a pseudonym, first name only or one initial. Writers are limited to one letter per month. Due to space limitations, the length limit is 350 words. Letters significantly longer will not be considered. All letters are subject to editing for clarity and length. E-mail letters should be sent to editor@siadvance.com. Unfortunately, for technical and security reasons, we are unable to open e-mails that arrive with attachments. Please submit these letters as common e-mails, remembering to observe the 350-word limit. The Advance will not publish poetry.

Give veterans of Iraq and Afghan wars the property tax benefit they deserve

There are few New Yorkers who have done more for our country than war veterans. Unfortunately, the men and women returning from Afghanistan and Iraq are being denied an important municipal property tax benefit.

Currently, veterans who fought in World War I, World War II, Vietnam, Korea, the Cold War and the Persian Gulf War are entitled to tax exemptions on their property through the New York Real Property Tax Law.

But this tax benefit is not extended to veterans coming home from Iraq and Afghanistan. We must pass state and city laws to ensure that these returning soldiers receive the same benefits that veterans of other wars already receive. It's the least we can do.

Eligible veterans receive a 15-percent exemption on the value of their homes. Those that served in a combat zone receive an additional 10 percent. Any veteran disabled in defense of our country qualifies for an extra exemption. The spouse or domestic partner

of a veteran is eligible as well for all exemptions, while the parents of a veteran killed in the line of duty are eligible for the first two exemption levels.

In 2007, 66,252 veterans' exemptions were given by New York City, resulting in an average savings of \$405 per property — savings that the veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan deserve as well.

State Sen. Eric Schneiderman and Assemblyman Sam Hoyt have introduced companion bills in Albany that would amend state law. Once passed on the state level, I will work to pass legislation in the City Council that will allow New York City to opt into this law.

Veterans make huge sacrifices to protect us all. They deserve our support in return. Amending the New York Real Property Tax Law will show our support for all veterans.

BETSY GOTBAUM
MANHATTAN

[The writer is the Public Advocate of New York City]

DAILY NEWS

Concerns grow over phony turf as Rufus King Park opens new field

7/28/08

BY BARRY PADDOCK

Monday, July 28th 2008, 5:15 PM

Despite calls for a moratorium on artificial turf, city officials cut the ribbon on Queens' newest synthetic sports field last week.

But amid health and environmental concerns about recycled rubber, the city is using alternate materials for future fields.

The new field at Rufus King Park in Jamaica features controversial "crumb rubber" made of tiny bits of shredded tires, which acts as artificial dirt, or infill, between synthetic blades of grass. An average soccer field uses 27,000 recycled tires.

"It's obviously completely against [Mayor] Bloomberg's phony greening of New York," said Geoffrey Croff of NYC Park Advocates. "They're taking away grass. It's absurd. Grass produces oxygen - it cleans the air."

Astoria's St. Michael's Park - under renovation since September - was also slated for recycled tire turf. But in April, the Parks Department changed course and ordered infill made of virgin rubber for the 120,000-square-foot field, Queens News has learned.

The new turf costs 38% more, adding nearly \$500,000 dollars to the price tag of the field, scheduled to open in September.

At last week's ribbon-cutting in Jamaica, Parks Commissioner Adrian Benepe said the upgrade in Astoria wasn't prompted by health concerns.

"This was the state of the art," Benepe said of the field under his feet at Rufus King Park. "But there are new products coming in line that we're taking a look at."

After critics raised concerns that shredded tires might leach toxins into groundwater or the air, the state Department of Environmental Conservation began lab and field tests in November. Results are due by year's end.

But Benepe dismissed worries over tire rubber, citing a city Health Department review of scientific studies he ordered "out of an excess of caution."

"Near as they can tell, there are no health risks," he said of the findings, released in May.

Some advocates criticized the report for merely reviewing existing studies - some conducted by the artificial turf industry - rather than conducting new tests.

"There's still a lot of concerns about the health risks," said Sheelah Feinberg, director of New Yorkers for Parks, one of the groups that in January joined Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum in calling for a moratorium;

Local community groups in Jamaica worked for years to secure public funding for a Rufus King renovation.

"The area had become a dust bowl," Community Board 12 district manager Yvonne Reddick said of the park before the installation of artificial turf.

"At first, I was kind of leery but it worked out well," Reddick said. "They can play soccer and leave the field and it still looks beautiful."

The city began installing synthetic turf 10 years ago. Queens now has 29 faux fields.

More are currently under construction. A Highland Park field will use rubber-coated sand as infill. A nearly completed field for baseball and soccer at Montpelier Park in Springfield Gardens is "carpet-style" turf without infill.

Benepe said it's impossible to maintain the heavily-used grass sports fields without frequent shutdowns and bans on the use of cleats. But at least one Queens resident is pushing elected officials to block the expensive new turf at St. Michael's Park.

Joe Lauria, 65, envisions summer jobs for local teens tending natural grass.

"People don't expect them to be perfect," he said of sports fields. "They expect there to be bald spots and glitches

here and there - that's the nature of it."



Staten Island Advance

EDITORIAL

STATE

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7/29/08

OUR OPINION

Welcome home

THE ISSUE: Veterans of the Iraq and Afghan eras deserve our thanks

WHERE WE STAND: Give them the property tax breaks given to other vets

Veterans who fought in the Spanish-American war got property tax breaks from the state of New York. So did those from World War I. Likewise for vets of World War II, Korea, Vietnam and the Persian Gulf War.

Do the New Yorkers who fought in Iraq and Afghanistan deserve the same thing? Yes, of course, wrote Betsy Gotbaum, New York City's public advocate, in a July 27 letter to the Your Opinion section of the Advance.

We strongly agree with her.

"There are few New Yorkers who have done more for our country than war veterans," noted Ms. Gotbaum in her letter. "Unfortunately, the men and women returning from Afghanistan and Iraq are being denied an important municipal property tax benefit."

Vets of the previous wartime eras can receive a 15 percent New York property tax exemption on the value of their homes. Those who served in a combat zone are eligible for another 10 percent. Plus any veteran disabled in defense of our country qualifies for a further exemption.

The spouse or domestic partner of such a veteran is also eligible for these exemptions, and the parents of a veteran killed in the line of duty are eligible for the first two exemptions.

From year to year, the tax breaks add up. A total of 66,252 veterans' exemptions were given by New York City in 2007, resulting in an average savings of \$405 per property.

It amounts to "savings that the veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan deserve as well," according to Ms. Gotbaum.

In her letter, she wrote: "State Sen. Eric Schneiderman and Assemblyman Sam Hoyt have introduced companion bills in Albany that would amend state law.

"Once passed on the state level, I will work to pass legislation in the City Council that will allow New York City to opt into this law."

Ms. Gotbaum's aim is on the mark: "Veterans make huge sacrifices to protect us all. They deserve our support in return. Amending the New York Real

Property Tax Law will show our support for all veterans."

Section 458-a of the New York State Real Property Tax Law would be amended to add the municipal breaks for homeowners who are veterans of the war in Afghanistan (Sept. 11, 2001, to present) and war in Iraq (March 12, 2003, to present).

The real property tax law would be changed to state that any county, city, town, or village that provides this property tax exemption will be reimbursed by the state for any lost revenue.

Urges State Sen. Schneiderman (D-Manhattan): "The men and women who have recently served our country and put their lives on the line deserve the same supports that veterans from previous generations have received. I call on my colleagues in the state Legislature to stand with our vets who bravely served in Afghanistan and Iraq to fix this tax loophole during the next special session."

Assemblyman Hoyt seconds the motion: "Veterans of recent wars served their country with distinction in a time where they have been asked to do more than ever. It is only right that the law treat them equally with other vets."

The lawmakers have the support of City Councilman and chairman of the Veterans Committee Hiram Monserrate: "Veterans from yesterday's wars and today's conflicts face and make the same sacrifices. Our own history sets a precedent for ensuring our soldiers who make it home are provided these property tax breaks. We cannot allow these men and women to pay another tax bill without the benefits they are entitled to. That's why we are calling on the city and state to take the first step to honoring veterans' service by ensuring this exemption is provided as soon as possible."

From Staten Island to Albany and elsewhere, New York homeowners who served in the military during the Iraq and Afghanistan wars deserve to receive these tax breaks — just like our veterans from prior conflicts.

ASAP (as soon as possible) is the military acronym that comes to mind.

7/30/08

Hot feet? You want a ticket with that?

Parks workers threaten parents with summons over kids going barefoot

EXCLUSIVE

BY MATT LYSIAK, ANNAIS MORALES, ERIN DURKIN AND RACHEL MONAHAN
DAILY NEWS WRITERS

THE CITY has found a creative way to deal with complaints that super-hot playground mats are burning children's feet:

Punish the parents.

Parents at parks around the city told the Daily News they've been threatened with fines for allowing their tykes to run barefoot among the slides and swings.

"This is no joke. Too many kids are burning their feet off," said one worker at Owls Head Park in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn. "If you take your shoes off, you will get a ticket."

Parks Department officials insisted the aggressive approach came from misinformed workers trying to keep kids from getting hurt on the often blistering safety mats.

Parks spokeswoman Jama Adams admitted parkgoers are required to follow posted rules instructing that shoes be worn — and that a summons could be written if kids don't take heed.

"People were giving out wrong information," said Adams. "It would be possible to write a summons, but no summonses have been issued."

But workers at St. Catherine's Park on the upper East Side and the Boxcar Playground in the Bronx's Crotona Park, warned that tickets would be written to those going barefoot.

"Parents [are] trying to sue," said a worker at St. Catherine's, who also said she is now required to water down the mats two or three times a day to keep them cool.

A mother at Russell Pederson Playground in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn, said a Parks worker told a group of mothers, "If you don't get shoes on your kids, you are going to get a ticket. We are instituting a zero-tolerance policy and you will be fined."

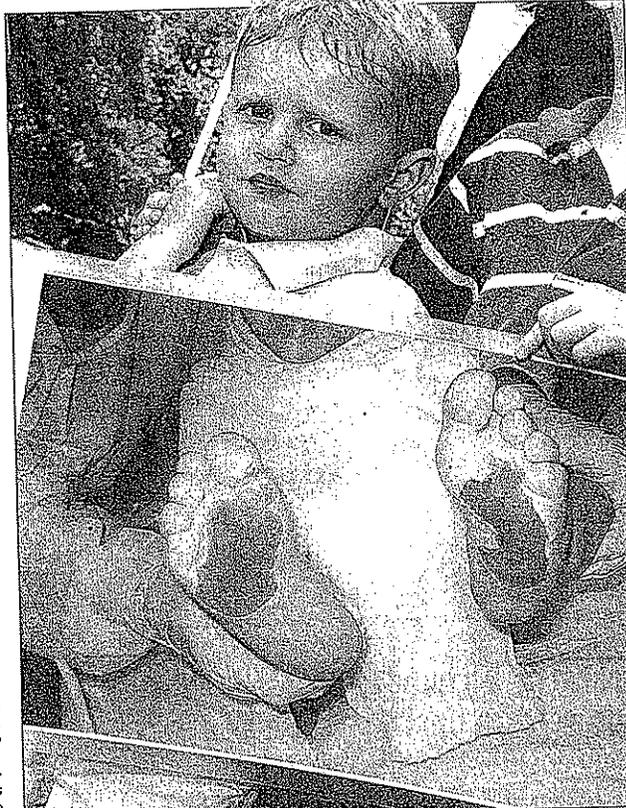
A Daily News investigation found scorching hot temperatures on surfaces at city parks, where artificial turf fields and the black mats under jungle gyms and slides can top 160 degrees.

Advocates and parents of toddlers burned on playground mats said ticketing was misguided approach.

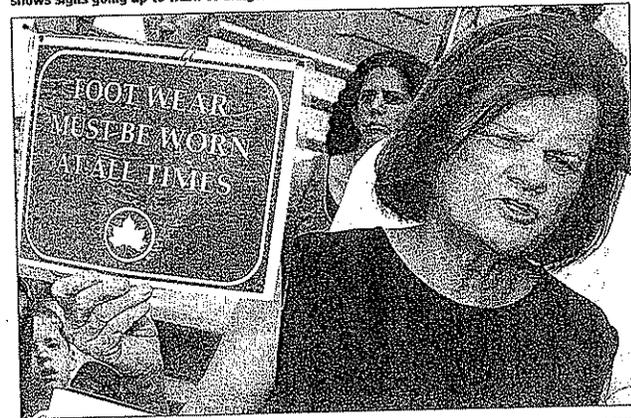
"That would be absurd," said Geoffrey Croft, of NYC Park Advocates. "Are they going to have the kids sign their names in crayon?"

Parents and advocates again called on the city to replace the safety mats yesterday and to make sure parks warn parents of the danger.

"Options are available that can eliminate this danger," said state Sen. Carl Kruger (D-Brooklyn), who suggested that there are cool safety surfaces on the market. "This is a wakeup call to the mayor."



Young William Cassen demonstrates at City Hall yesterday with a picture of the second-degree burns he got in a city playground in May 2007. Later, Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum, below, shows signs going up to warn of danger from sun-scorched mats. Photos by Marc Hermann



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DAILY NEWS

Wednesday, July 30, 2008



7/31/08

Mike plans overhaul of vocational schools

The city plans to do some tinkering with its trade schools.

Mayor Bloomberg announced an overhaul of the city's vocational schools yesterday to make them more academically challenging, soliciting private funds and opening three new ones.

Acknowledging mixed results for the city's 21 schools dedicated to career and technical training — which serve about 30,000 kids — Bloomberg also called for a greater partnership between the automotive, construction and other industries

and the schools.

Based on recommendations from a task force he convened earlier this year to bolster the sagging vocational program, Bloomberg also called on the schools to prepare students not just for trades but also for higher

education — with the assistance of CUNY.

Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum welcomed the move.

"I'm glad to see the Bloomberg administration taking [vocational schools] on so seriously," she said.

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